

Public Forum

Contested Ideological, Linguistic, and Pedagogical Values in Nicaragua: The Case of the Atlantic Coast*

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The Eastern Coast region of Nicaragua, commonly known as the Atlantic Coast, presents an interesting case study of the tensions that exist between the drive of ethnic groups for cultural self-identity and political autonomy and the interests of central governments for national unity and control over valuable natural resources. The case of Nicaragua is unique for a variety of reasons. Among these reasons are the significant political changes that have occurred since 1979, and the manner in which political regimes, differing radically in their ideological orientations, have attempted to cope with indigenous and minority populations living in the eastern half of the country.

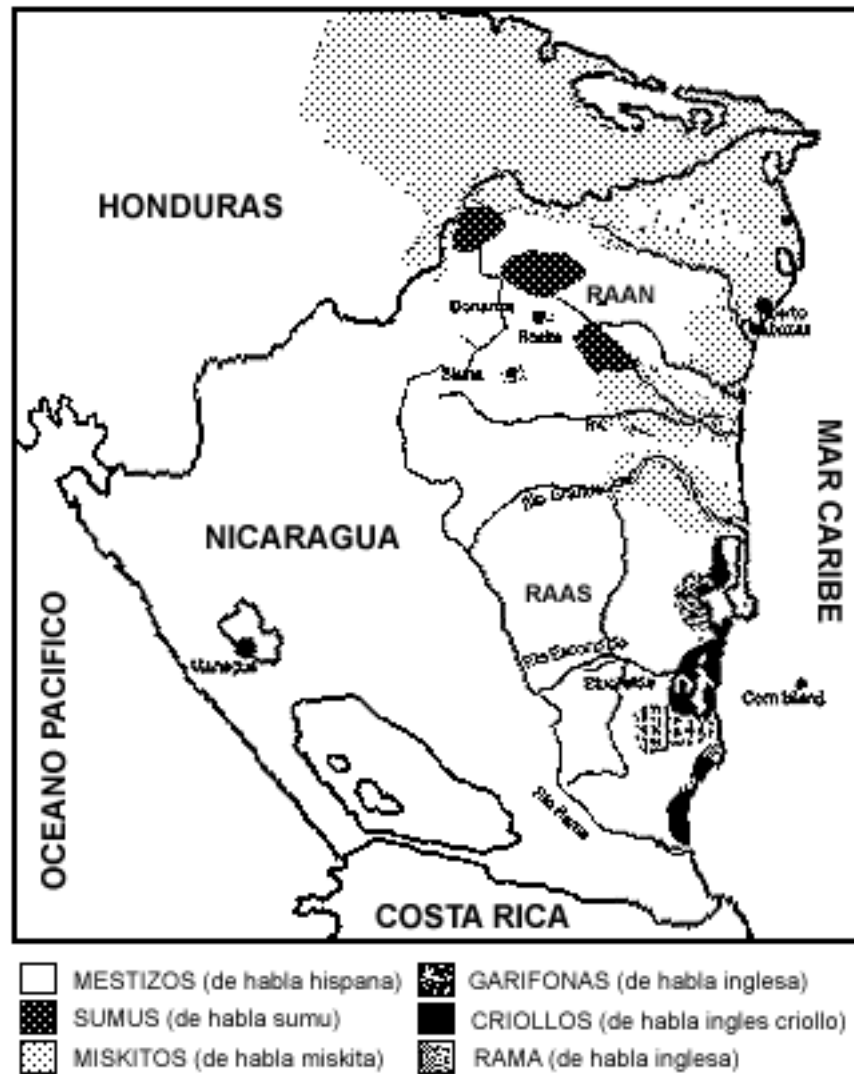
This paper reviews the recent political changes that have occurred in the country, and provides a brief description of the history and characteristics of the Atlantic Coast Region. The main focus of our analysis is on the promise and limitations of the linguistic and educational policies initiated by successive Managua-based governments to integrate the region into national society. In particular, we examine issues related to the bilingual education model being introduced, the appropriateness and adequacy of educational materials and teacher preparation, and the extent to which educators in the region have the authority and resources to implement a successful bilingual-intercultural education program. We conclude with what comparative lessons might be drawn from a study of the Nicaraguan case.

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Political Changes

Over the past thirteen years (1979-92), the country has undergone two major political transformations that have affected all spheres of society and have affected national policies toward the peoples of the Atlantic Coast Region in particular. In 1979, a broad coalition of forces, led by the Sandinista National Liberation Front (FSLN, Frente Sandinista de Liberación Nacional) overthrew the repressive regime of the Somoza family that had governed the country, in combination with a praetorian National Guard, for over four decades. The new regime set out to transform the society, pursuing what might be generally described as a socialist path to development while adhering to the over-arching principles of a mixed economy, political and cultural pluralism, and a nonaligned foreign policy. The second transformation came with the national elections in February of 1990, in which a coalition of fourteen political parties and alliances, ranging from the extreme right to the extreme left, defeated the FSLN government headed by Daniel Ortega. The new government of the National Opposition Union (UNO, Unión Nacional Opositora), headed by Violeta Barrios de Chamorro, has embarked upon what is in many respects a diametrically opposed path to development. Closely following the monetary stabilization and economic adjustment policies of the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank, the UNO government has set out to dismantle many of the economic and social policies of the Sandinistas by privatizing state property and functions and integrating the Nicaraguan economy more tightly into the global economy.

In accordance with this changed political and economic framework, there have been significant moves to reduce the role of the State in education and to decentralize a number of the Ministry of Education's functions to the municipal level and, in the case of the Atlantic Coast, to the regional level. In the field of education and culture, perhaps the most dramatic changes have been in the immediate and far-sweeping reforms introduced in the content of textbooks. During the period from April 1990 to March 1991, the government virtually replaced all existing texts and developed texts for new curricular areas, such as civics and morality. The replacement of texts and curricular revision were part of a wholesale effort to "exorcise" Sandinista political thought and values from the education system (Arrien, 1991).

Figure 1**Mapa demográfico y lingüístico del Caribe nicaragüense**

The Atlantic Coast Region¹

These dramatic changes in the political economy of the country and the corresponding changes in national, educational, and cultural policies have had a major impact on the Atlantic Coast Region, which until 1979 was only marginally integrated into the national society. The Atlantic Coast comprises approximately half the territory of Nicaragua and has less than ten percent of its population. This population is represented by six ethnic groups which are: Miskitus² and Sumus, indigenous groups which have conserved their customs and languages; Creoles, descendants of African slaves who migrated to the region after the abolition of slavery in Jamaica in 1834, and who speak creole English; Mestizos, Spanish-indigenous persons whose mother tongue is Spanish; and the Ramas and Garífunas (or Caribes) who are highly assimilated linguistically and culturally with the Creoles. Since the eighteenth century, these groups have been more closely aligned culturally, commercially, and politically with England and the United States than with Spain or the Pacific Coast of Nicaragua. Indeed, the collective identities of the inhabitants of the Atlantic Coast are defined as much by their history of opposition to the Spanish-speaking and Catholic Pacific Coast as by their affinity for things Anglo-North American and their collective memory of a glorious past related to the Mosquitia Kingdom. Contact with English buccaneers began in 1560, and, according to Shapiro (1987, p. 68), "Through these trade relations a local indigenous power structure developed of Miskito Indians loyal to the English crown." Over the ensuing three hundred years, Britain ruled indirectly through these Miskito kings. During various periods, when British interests were threatened by other European powers, England went so far as to claim the area as a protectorate of the British Crown.

By the mid-nineteenth century, the United States entered the picture as an emerging hemispheric power interested in Nicaragua as the site for an interoceanic canal. Over the next fifty years, the

¹The authors wish to acknowledge the contribution of Judy Butler. Through her manuscript in progress on the Atlantic Coast, she has provided background information for the historical section of this essay.

²Although the spelling of "Miskito" has been frequently used, this is an Hispanization. The Miskitu language does not have the vowel "o. Therefore it is more accurate to refer to the people and their language as Miskitu. Linguists and anthropologists increasingly are using this term.

United States replaced England as the dominant political and economic power in the region. The isolation of the Atlantic Coast region from the rest of Nicaragua was reflected in the Treaty of Managua (1860), which granted the Miskitu Indians the right to govern themselves.

By 1894, however, the nationalist and developmental policies of the Nicaraguan Liberal government of José Santos Zelaya led to armed intervention in the region and “re-incorporation” of the eastern coastal area into the nation. The region was renamed the Department of Zelaya, and remained as such until the 1979 revolution that brought the Sandinistas to power.

Another major foreign influence shaping culture and education in the Atlantic Coast region was the Moravian church, which arrived on the coast in 1849. Through its influence, this German Protestant church, further widened the cultural gap between the Atlantic Coast region and the Roman Catholic, Spanish-speaking Pacific Coast of the country. During World War I, the headquarters of the Moravian church moved from Germany to the United States, thereby further reinforcing North American involvement in the region.

The church has played a significant role in the codification of the Miskitu language as well as contributing to the formation of an English-speaking Creole elite. By the end of the nineteenth century, the Moravian church was conducting a large part of its religious services in Miskitu and had translated its hymnbook and liturgy into the indigenous language. By 1905, the New Testament had been translated into Miskitu (Norwood & Zeledón, 1985, p. 17). In addition to establishing Miskitu-language schools in the northeastern port town of Puerto Cabezas, the church also ran English-language primary and secondary schools in the Creole-dominated southeastern port of Bluefields. These Miskitu-and English-language schools, however, were later closed by the nationalistic Zelaya government, which prohibited instruction in any language but Spanish. This policy of forced language assimilation was perpetuated by successive governments and especially by Anastasio Somoza García who, in 1942, built a dozen new primary schools in the Miskitu villages along the Rio Coco, and replaced indigenous teachers with Spanish-speaking teachers.

Later, during the Somoza regime, there were subsequent efforts to institute bilingual education. In the 1950s, there was a pilot project in the Rio Coco area to teach the Miskitu inhabitants in their native tongue during the first two years of basic education and to

gradually introduce Spanish as a language of instruction. An external assessment of the project noted that the literacy project arrived "in the form of propaganda" (Minano-García, 1960). The young teachers who were sent to work in the project were poorly prepared for the challenges they were to meet and the project failed to have any major or lasting effect on the area.

The history of relations between the two coasts of Nicaragua can be summed up as a historical antagonism also characterized by attempts at forced assimilation of the Atlantic Coast populations. The general ignorance of each others' cultures has been compounded by attitudes of condescension on the part of Pacific Coast peoples toward the Atlantic Coast inhabitants. Historically, the Pacific Coast Nicaraguans have viewed the Atlantic Coast peoples as being backward and inferior due to their lack of a knowledge of Spanish and of the "civilized" ways of the rest of the country.

The Atlantic Coast During the Sandinista Revolution (1979-90)

The triumph of the Sandinista National Liberation Front in mid-July 1979 was greeted with considerably less enthusiasm on the Atlantic Coast. The Atlantic Coast had experienced only limited conflict during the previous two years, when there were massive uprisings in the rest of the country against the Somoza regimes. The overall policy of the Somoza regime toward the Atlantic Coast had been one of relative neglect. Now, however, the policy thrust of the FSLN was suddenly one of active intervention. This intervention was directed in large part at redressing the past economic exploitation of the Atlantic Coast by foreign powers and commercial interests and the abandonment of the region by Managua-based governments. The illiteracy rate was the highest in the country, health facilities were scarce, and the region lacked basic transportation infrastructure and telecommunication contact with the rest of the country. During the first eighteen months of FSLN rule, the central government invested more per capita in the Atlantic Coast region than in the rest of the country. It invested roughly two-and-one-half times the amount in revenue raised by the coast itself. However, the Sandinistas also rode rather roughshod over local sensibilities by appointing governmental authorities foreign to the region. Although committed in its historical manifesto to large-scale participation in national decision-making, the Sandinistas, very

much in the tradition of their predecessors, initially viewed the inhabitants of the region as being backward, and consequently they propounded a developmentalist, and assimilationist policy.

Insensitivity and condescension on the part of Sandinistas were tempered, though, by a growing receptivity on their part to the demands of indigenous organizations that had formed on the coast in the 1970s and which appeared to be pro-Sandinista. MISURU, an indigenous organization of Sandinistas and Sumus formed in 1974, reconstituted itself in 1979 as MISURASATA (Miskitus, Sumus, Ramas, and Sandinistas "United Together"). MISURASATA played a key role in assisting the 1980 Spanish-language national literacy crusade on the Atlantic Coast, and its leaders were able to convince the Ministry of Education to undertake a follow-up literacy campaign in indigenous languages (Miskitu, Sumu, and English) between October 1980 and February 1981. MISURASATA founder and Miskitu leader Steadman Fagoth Müller was appointed to the forty-seven member Council of State, and in that position, he encouraged the government in 1980 to pass Decree 571 of 25 November 1980. The decree states that "the maternal language constitutes a fundamental factor in the existence of persons and peoples and is a determining factor in the process of integration and consolidation of National Unity." Article 1 authorized "instruction at the pre-primary and in the first four grades of primary in Miskitu and English languages in the schools in the zone... "where the respective indigenous and Creole communities resided.

Despite these favorable beginnings, there were major points of contention between Sandinista and indigenous leaders. While the rights to cultural expression and an education in one's own language were important claims of the indigenous groups (articulated as early as 1974 in the founding documents of MISURU), there were issues of land ownership, control over natural resources, and the rights to political autonomy. A number of the MISURASATA leaders had participated in international conferences of indigenous groups during the 1970s, and had been influenced by more radical indigenous leaders around the world. These leaders came to view themselves not only as minority groups entitled to certain rights in national societies, but as original inhabitants of the lands that had been unjustly wrested from them by colonial powers and colonists. The demands of such radical indigenists took the form of claims for separate territories, decisive control over natural resources, and a

degree of political independence that was threatening to national authorities.

The Sandinistas, who viewed exploitation in economic terms, and not, initially, in ethnic terms had difficulty in understanding the nature of the claims being made by such indigenous leaders. As Hale (1990) has noted in his study, “...Sandinista revolutionary nationalism had a problematic feature for the Miskitu, who had retained a strong identity. It stopped short of acknowledging Indians as ‘revolutionary subjects’ with legitimate demands for and rights to ethnic-based political power” (p. 360).

Tensions came to a head in February of 1981, when MISURASATA leaders planned to use the official closure of the literacy campaign in indigenous languages to publicly announce to the national media and to the Sandinista leadership their claims to 45,000 square kilometers of land, representing approximately three-fourths of the territory of the region, and to have membership on the ruling junta. MISURASTA leaders, over the previous months, had used the literacy campaign in indigenous languages as a vehicle to reach and organize Miskitus in preparation for these claims.³

From the Sandinista perspective, these claims were considered prejudicial to national unity and the revolutionary project. The MISURASATA leaders were jailed before they could make their demands. With the exception of Fagoth, who remained in jail for several months before he was freed, most of the leadership was released within several weeks. When he fled to Honduras in May 1981, thousands followed him. By the end of the year, the Miskitu resistance joined with the emerging counterrevolutionary army, then denominated the Nicaraguan Democratic Forces, taking shape in Honduras⁴ and by December, the first attacks were launched against Nicaraguan territory.

Civil war raged in the region over the ensuing eight years. In January and February of 1982, approximately 8,500 Miskitu Indians were forcibly removed from their villages along the Río Coco to resettlement camps in an area designated Tasba Pri, some 35 miles inland. The relocation was undertaken by the Sandinista

³The Sandinistas, after this experience with the use of indigenous languages in literacy instruction, were reluctant to implement Decree 571 concerning bilingual education for some years.

⁴The leadership of the Nicaraguan Democratic Forces consisted of ex-National Guardsmen and officers, trained and assisted by the Argentinean military and the CIA.

government to remove a sanctuary and supply for counter-revolutionary activity as well as to protect the lives and safety of the inhabitants in what had been a "free fire zone." Those who were not resettled fled across the river to Honduras or made their way to the relatively more secure port city of Puerto Cabezas.⁵ Populations in the southern half of the region migrated to the city of Bluefields or fled to Costa Rica. In the ensuing years, there was not only massive displacement of rural populations throughout the region and country, but wanton destruction of infrastructure, agricultural cooperatives, and schools and health centers--which were considered prime targets for counterrevolutionary attack.

Despite this massive disruption, bilingual education programs were ultimately begun as part of general reform efforts by the Sandinistas. By 1984, there was a decisive move on the part of the FSLN to recognize its past heavy-handed ways and insensitivity toward the inhabitants of the Atlantic Coast region. Along with administrative reforms, initiated in 1982, to delegate greater decision-making powers to the departmental level throughout the rest of the country, the centralized and heavily militarized command structure wielded over the Atlantic Coast by INNICA (Nicaraguan Institute for the Atlantic Coast) was revamped. Authority over coastal affairs was delegated to civilian governments located in Puerto Cabezas and Bluefields.

In February 1984, the government initiated its first experimental project in bilingual education in Sumubila (Tasba Pri). That year, 35 preschool and 180 first grade students were enrolled in Miskitu-language classes with 7 teachers. In 1985, the program was extended to Creoles and Sumus. The program in English was initially offered to over 600 students in three communities--Bluefields, Haulover, and Corn Island--and employed 21 teachers. Each year, another grade was to be added to the program in accordance with local capabilities and resources. By 1990, the bilingual education program covered grades one through four in the Miskitu-language program, grades one through six in the English program for Creoles as well as Ramas and Garífunas, and the first two grades in Sumu. During this period, a number of indigenous and Creole educators were employed by the Ministry of Education to develop appropriate curricular materials, to train and supervise

⁵An estimated 40,000 Miskitus and Sumus were refugees in Honduras, and the populations of these coastal towns more than quadrupled.

teachers, and to administer the program. Prior to the February 1990 national elections, there were over 25 technical personnel employed in the field and six in ministry headquarters in Managua. Texts were being revised and attempts were being made to incorporate folk tales and traditional children's stories into curricula to reflect coastal realities and culture.

The basis for bilingual education in the region was strengthened through ratification of a new national constitution in 1987. Article 121 of the 1987 Constitution states that "communities of the Atlantic Coast have access in the region to education in their maternal languages to levels that are determined in accordance with national plans and programs." Also, Articles 89-91 recognize the right of the Atlantic Coast communities to preserve and develop their cultural identity as part of national unity, and to administer local affairs in conformity with their traditions. Most significantly, for the first time in the history of the country, the 1987 national constitution recognizes that Nicaragua is a multiethnic nation (Article 8); the languages of Atlantic Coast communities, in addition to Spanish, will have official status depending on those situations established by law (Article 11); and the development of the region's culture and values "enriches the national culture" (Article 90).

Despite the good intentions, however, there were two major weaknesses of the program which had been obvious since its inception in 1984. They were the lack of appropriate materials in indigenous languages and inadequately prepared teachers. Many of the texts were simply translations of Spanish-language materials used in the rest of the country. Although for the Creoles there were more materials available in English from various external sources, their relevance to the Creole populations of the Atlantic Coast of Nicaragua was problematic. Furthermore, there were unresolved issues related to the use of standard English rather than the Creole English that is spoken in the southern coastal area. In addition, the development and dissemination of educational materials and the systematic upgrading of teachers in the field were extraordinarily difficult tasks to accomplish in the region due to the lack of basic year-round surface roads. In fact, throughout large sections of the region the surest mode of transportation is dugout canoe. All these

factors placed in question the feasibility of implementing a maintenance model of bilingual education.⁶

However, the strengths and benefits of the program have been evident since the initial project in Sumubila was evaluated in 1984. In this evaluation, it was found that the use of the maternal tongue was associated with more rapid learning and with increased active classroom participation. The bilingual model also was associated with greater mastery of the phonemic structure of the native language; and bilingually educated students had fewer difficulties in school than did their counterparts receiving instruction only in Spanish. Parents generally seemed pleased with the positive response of their children to bilingual education. Many parents, along with the coastal political leaders, saw this program as a vindication of past neglect and injustices.

Indigenous educational leaders envisioned a bilingual education program that would contribute to a greater understanding of the history and culture of the region, and to empowering individuals and collectives to define the problems confronting them and to undertake action to resolve them. They also envisioned the achievement of stronger ties of solidarity with the rest of the country (Shapiro, 1987). The war situation and the overall economic poverty of the region, combined with the educational deficiencies noted above, prevented the wide-scale realization of those ideals. By the time of the February 1990 elections, most of the Atlantic Coast region was at peace. All but several thousands of the refugees in Honduras had returned, and with the assistance of the United Nations High Commission for Refugee Relief and dozens of international and binational technical assistance agencies, the Atlantic Coast residents were attempting to restore their villages and begin life anew. The Ministry of Education in collaboration with regional technical teams did an evaluation of the Program of Bilingual Intercultural Education (PEBI, Programa de Educación Bilingüe Intercultural), and both strengths and weaknesses were found. Nonetheless progress had

⁶Both maintenance and transitional bilingual-intercultural education models, seek to develop the cognitive, linguistic and cultural competencies of the learners in their first language (L1) while gradually introducing students to the second language (L2). However, in a transitional model, all instruction in L1 is phased out at a point when it is determined that students have sufficient proficiency in L2 to receive all instruction in that language. In a maintenance model, however, some instruction is continued in L1 even after the student has become proficient in L2. The goal of this model is to maintain proficiency in L1 while also reaching full proficiency in L2.

been made by the time the Sandinista government lost the February 1990 elections. In retrospect, as the past and present directors of the Center for Documentation and Investigation of the Atlantic Coast (CIDCA, Centro de Investigación y Documentación de la Costa Atlántica) have noted, "The treatment that Nicaragua gave to bilingual education during the Sandinista government can be characterized as a serious and sincere effort of the society... to meet the educational necessities of its indigenous peoples and ethnic communities" (Gurdián & Salamanca, 1991, p. 12).

Several months after coming to power on April 25, 1990, the Chamorro administration issued a statement of basic principles, outlining its educational policies. In Section 8 of its July 1990 statement, the new government declares its intentions to promote the development of bilingual and intercultural educational programs that respond to the needs of the Miskitus, Sumus, and Ramas. It further states its intentions to directly involve the leaders and representatives of indigenous communities in the development of programs aimed at the preservation of indigenous languages, while meeting the demands of Nicaraguans to be provided with the basic elements of universal culture (Ministry of Education, n.d, p. 13).⁷

Despite the well-meaning intentions of the newly elected government, months passed with little attention to the bilingual education program. The person responsible for bilingual education in the Ministry of Education (MED) in Managua reported that he spent the first five months in office essentially doing nothing because of inaction on the part of central MED authorities. He was fired from his position at the end of September 1990, when it became obvious that he was not in agreement with the new MED policies. During the same five-month period, inaction in educational matters was mirrored by failure of the national government to allocate any funds for the administration of the Regional Councils of the Autonomous Northern Atlantic Region (RAAN, Región Autónoma del Atlántico Norte) and Autonomous Southern Atlantic Region (RAAS, Región Autónoma del Atlántico Sur), the nominally self-governing regions which had been established during the Sandinista regime. On the other hand, President Chamorro, almost

⁷The document does not mention the Creole populations of the Atlantic Coast as being part of the bilingual-intercultural education program, nor does it indicate what Nicaraguan groups are demanding what specific elements of the undefined term 'universal culture.'

immediately after her inauguration on April 25, 1990, announced the creation of the Nicaraguan Institute for the Development of the Autonomous Regions (INDERA, Instituto Nicaragüense para el Desarrollo de las Regiones Autónomas). The decision was precipitous and controversial for several reasons. The institute was created without consulting the regional councils and governments constituted after the February 1990 elections; the institute was not created as a coordinating or liaison agency responsible to regional authorities but as a type of super-ministry overseeing national government relations with the coast; and, its newly appointed head was Brooklyn Rivera, President Chamorro's principal electoral advisor for the region.⁸

More than a year into the Chamorro administration, the socioeconomic situation on the Atlantic Coast was one of continued extreme poverty with massive unemployment. There were complex and intensive political rivalries, with armed takeovers of towns by former combatants who were demanding land, tools, and social services which had been promised to them when they demobilized. Within this context, the question is, what progress is the current government making in its stated commitment to bilingual education? Answers pivot on a consideration of what linguistic model is being followed, along with the appropriateness of curricular materials and the competency of teachers. A related set of issues pertains to whether decision-making has devolved to regional educational authorities or if instead ministerial functions have simply been moved from Managua to the region without a corresponding shift in power and resources.

The Five-Year Bilingual Intercultural Education Plan: 1992-96

Partial answers to our questions may be gleaned by examining what the Chamorro government proposed for the Atlantic Coast region according to the current five-year bilingual intercultural education plan. The stated rationale for this new plan stems from the realization that Nicaraguan society is truly multicultural and

⁸As a past military and political commander of MISURASATA, which had its base of operations in Costa Rica throughout much of the civil war, Rivera was a political antagonist of Steadman Fagoth Mueller, who headed the rival armed group of Miskitus known as MISURA with its headquarters in Honduras. The disputes between these two Miskitu leaders and their followers have disrupted civil life in the region.

multilingual and that schools, by incorporating culturally and linguistically appropriate curricula, can serve as an instrument of national and regional integration.

The Ministry of Education document, which outlines the five-year plan, provides some perspective on the ways in which the cultural backgrounds of the Atlantic Coast groups are viewed by the authors of the plan. The Atlantic Coast is described as being quite distinct from the rest of Nicaragua in terms of customs, linguistic traditions, beliefs, dances, food, style of dress, type of work, and the influence of the Moravian church in people's lives. Stereotypical statements are made in the document about several perceived cultural traits. For example, it is pointed out that when returning from the day's work, the women tend to carry the firewood and foodstuff, while the men only carry their machete and the oars. It is stated that the people "live in the present without thinking much about the future," and the Creoles are described as having "exotic and rhythmic" dances (Ministry of Education, n.d., p. 2). In accordance with the general attitudes of mainstream Nicaraguans toward the Atlantic Coast peoples, these statements appear possibly to reflect an ethnocentric view of these groups on the part of the authors of the five-year plan.

On the other hand, it is acknowledged in the plan, for example, that the language of the Creoles is not a case of poorly spoken English, but rather a legitimate language which is rule-governed and fits this population's sociocultural needs. It also is suggested that not very much is known about the cultural and linguistic aspects of these groups. Therefore, it is recommended that researchers conduct regional studies designed to serve as a basis for curriculum development reflecting local realities. However, in suggesting that information is lacking on the cultures of the Atlantic Coast, the authors of the five-year plan fail to recognize the wealth of data gathered on these groups by the Center for Research and Development of the Atlantic Coast (CIDCA) (Arnove, 1986, p. 80).

The Chamorro government acknowledges in the five-year plan that the legitimacy of bilingual education is backed by the Constitution of 1987 and by the Autonomy Law for the Atlantic Coast. The plan, thus, recognizes the legal bases established during the Sandinista regime, and the current officials of the Ministry of Education have stated that indigenous peoples of the Atlantic Coast should be incorporated into the national culture through bilingual education. According to the authors of the plan, this policy has been

stimulated by a recognition of the large number of school dropouts and poor promotion rates representative of students on the Atlantic Coast who speak a minority language. These poor results are attributed to the mismatch between the home language and that of the school (Spanish) in the Atlantic Coast region. In the five-year plan, the Sandinista bilingual education pilot project in Sumubila is referred to and the results are described as “encouraging” (Ministry of Education, n.d., p. 3).

Conceptually, the five-year plan hinges on the premise that students learn more efficaciously through their first language (L1). As such, L1 is suggested as the medium of instruction while gradually introducing Spanish as a second language (L2). According to the plan, textbooks in L2 are introduced in the second or third grade, depending on the language group being served. The specific model of bilingual education proposed is one of linguistic and cultural maintenance. In other words, the goal is for students to become proficient in Spanish while maintaining their first language and their cultural identity.

In the five-year plan there is a stated awareness of the close interrelationship between language and culture. It is said that intercultural communication should play a key role in the instructional process, and that the bilingual model of instruction should “recover, develop and strengthen the native culture of each ethnic group, establishing connections between the different cultures in such a way that they influence each other mutually” (Ministry of Education, n.d., p. 9). At the same time, however, the bilingual approach is seen as a bridge to national integration. Quoting from the plan, “an ethnic cosmovision [sic] is the other pole around which the model is built, in which, piece by piece, the national culture and universal culture are integrated, forming in this way an integral human being, capable of feeling proud of his [sic] origin and his [sic] sense of belonging, and of being Nicaraguan” (Ministry of Education, n.d., p. 9).

To accomplish the above pedagogical and civic mission, a set of specific objectives is outlined. These objectives include development of curricula which “establish coherency between national and regional objectives within the framework of the Statute of Autonomy of the Atlantic Coast” (Ministry of Education, n.d., p. 10). They also include improvement of teacher preparation, improvement of school and community relations, completion of sociocultural and linguistic investigations, provision of technical

support, provision of adequate and appropriate education materials, development of a stronger financial base, and encouragement of local support of bilingual education on the Atlantic Coast as well as a nationwide appreciation of the value of bilingual education. The plan spells out twenty-six strategies for carrying out these objectives.

It is projected that under the five-year plan, about 26,466 children will be served by 1996. The goal is eventually to incorporate into bilingual programs about 78% of all students in need of such services. To serve these students, it is projected that there will be a need for 756 bilingual classrooms. This projection is based on a teacher-student ratio of 1:35. (It should be noted that this ratio is much lower than the current teacher: student ratio found in most elementary classrooms throughout Nicaragua.)

By 1992, the bilingual program was to have approximately 317 teachers, suggesting that at least 439 would have to be trained to meet the 1996 goal of 756 bilingual classrooms. It is acknowledged in the five-year plan, however, that most of the teachers in the program lack adequate preparation, let alone bilingual training. The overwhelming majority of the teachers themselves have a sixth grade education or less. More specifically, there were, according to the document, 23 teachers with a degree in primary education; 18 with a degree in basic education; 22 with a high school diploma; 214 with a sixth grade education, and 40 with the equivalent of a third grade education. In addition to their overall lack of training, these teachers do not have any significant bilingual education preparation--something the Ministry of Education would like to remedy in the future.

Projections for teacher training are briefly outlined in the five-year plan, and are considered to be a fundamental key to the development of bilingual intercultural education in the region. According to the plan, the Ministry currently proposes to have four workshops each year. The purpose of these workshops is to provide training in the new curricular components and methodology to be used in the programs. In addition, training is to be provided for the teachers to further develop their Spanish language skills. (Most, if not all, of the teachers are from the community where they teach and speak Spanish as a second language.) Beginning in 1992, inservice teachers, without degrees in primary education, were to be helped to complete this degree. In 1993, curricular materials were

to be developed for the bilingual teacher training program, and in 1994 formal training is to begin for degrees in bilingual education.

The five-year plan document closes with year-by-year projections for completing the transformation of curricula for the region. A grade-by-grade timetable is established for implementing the new bilingual program for each of the three major language groups--Miskitu, Sumu, and Creole. It is interesting to point out that for the largest group, the Miskitus, the first step listed is to provide orientation for teachers in the use of the textbooks, *Azul y Blanco*. These are new government textbooks which have already been translated into Miskitu from the original Spanish versions for the first through third grade. ("Azul y Blanco" means "Blue and White," the colors of the Nicaraguan flag. During the Sandinista period, the black and red flag of the Sandinista party shared equal prominence with the "blue and white" national flag. Under the Chamorro government, the Sandinista flag has been removed from the new textbooks.) The significance of the government's emphasis on the rapid implementation of the new textbooks is explored later in this study.

Preparation and Upgrading of Bilingual Teachers

In our description of the MED's five-year plan, we have referred to the ministry's concern with teacher preparation. We now look more closely at some of the current efforts in teacher preparation. The situation is a very challenging one. In a country where there is a rapid turnover of teachers due to the extremely poor pay which they receive (\$60-\$80 a month), the attrition rate on the Atlantic Coast may be even higher. Not only has there been a chronic shortage of certified teachers, as mentioned before, but there has been virtually no bilingual education preservice teacher preparation and little systematic inservice training of bilingual teachers. Over the past two years, in accordance with the five-year plan, most of the inservice courses have been aimed at certifying ("professionalizing") Atlantic Coast teachers, a majority of whom have less than nine years of schooling. The professionalization courses are taught in Spanish and follow the same curriculum used in preservice education in normal schools. The instruction is very intensive--the equivalent of one year of teacher education is offered during a ten-week period between academic years--and it is so overloaded with traditional academic content that no space exists for any in-depth training directly related to bilingual education. As one international

consultant to PEBI noted, the courses teach about Aristotle but not about the Atlantic Coast. An occasional pertinent lecture, however, is included in the offerings. During the 1992 session, two members from CIDCA were able to give one lecture on the history of the coast and one on PEBI.

Beginning in 1992, plans were underway to prepare a team of about 30 bilingual education teacher trainers who, in turn, would train 150 indigenous teachers in the northern Atlantic Coast autonomous region. The previous year, a Nicaraguan team spent several months in Cataluña and the Basque country of Spain studying bilingual education programs in those autonomous regions of Spain. In addition, two bilingual education specialists from Cataluña went to Nicaragua to participate in the ten-week professionalization courses for approximately 700 teachers in Puerto Cabezas and Rosita. Their plans to prepare teacher trainers and reach an expanded number of teachers, however, were thwarted by administrators of the inservice courses who did not provide any opportunities during the regularly scheduled offerings for specialized instruction in bilingual education (Arnové, forthcoming).

Other than the failure of MED agencies to provide opportunities for appropriate systematic instruction in bilingual education, there is the resistance on the part of some teachers to PEBI, and ambivalent feelings on the part of others. Outside consultants have noted that a number of nonindigenous or Mestizo (Spanish-language) teachers are leery of instruction in indigenous languages. Also, in the RAAN, a number of Miskitu and Sumu teachers think that their lack of knowledge of Spanish hurts their opportunities for professional advancement, and they fear that bilingual education will further limit the opportunities to master Spanish. Given these difficulties and misunderstandings regarding the value of bilingual education, a major boost to the programs would be the creation of a bilingual teacher education program in one of the country's normal schools. In accordance with the five-year plan, preparations are underway to create such specialized programs in Puerto Cabezas and possibly Bluefields. Before such programs can be established, however, the challenge will be to develop an appropriate curriculum and to train specialized faculty.

Delegation or Deconcentration of Ministry Functions? The Question of Textbooks

In 1991, the Ministry of Education underwent a reorganization by which a stratum of regional administrators throughout the country was eliminated. Decision-making supposedly was delegated to the municipal level. At the same time, a new category of national supervisors was created.

With regard to administration of PEBI, it was expected that only one administrator would be left in MED central headquarters by the beginning of the 1992 academic year. Most of the curricular, supervisory, and administrative functions were to be shifted to Puerto Cabezas for the RAAN and to Bluefields for the RAAS. Technical teams working in the mining towns of Rosita and Siuna were to be relocated in Puerto Cabezas. Whereas there once were 32 PEBI coordinators and technical personnel working on the coast, the number was to be reduced to under 25, and plans call for no more than 26 by 1993.

The major test of ministry willingness to delegate authority, rather than simply relocate personnel and performance of routine tasks to field offices, centers on questions of who determines the curriculum. The clearest manifestation of the power of the central administration to choose curricular material was the action by the MED regarding the new textbooks for the Atlantic Coast. It has been noted that in the five-year plan, one of the first steps listed for the implementation of the Chamorro government's bilingual program for the Miskitus is training in the use of the new reading textbooks *Azul y Blanco*. In his presentation of *Azul y Blanco* to the Nicaraguan people, then Minister of Education, Sofonías Cisneros Leiva (1990), stated:

This book represents, in effect, one of the best Spanish works in Nicaragua and Latin America. The materials and exercises included in its pages have been formulated according to the most advanced pedagogical techniques, paying special attention to child psychology and the way in which children interpret their world (p. 2).

Despite this promising introduction, many educators from the Atlantic Coast objected to the introduction of such textbooks, which have been provided to them in Miskitu versions entitled *Siakni Bara Pihni*. Hans Petter Buvollen (1991), a Norwegian anthropologist

who has been involved with the Bilingual Education Intercultural Project (PEBI) in Puerto Cabezas, suggests that introducing the controversial textbook series to the Atlantic Coast region in Miskitu was a mistake for several reasons. To begin with, the translation from Spanish to Miskitu was done without first consulting with respected indigenous educators. These educators have labored under very trying conditions since 1984 to produce culturally and linguistically appropriate curricula. For example, Buvollen notes that some of the Miskitu oral histories, which already have been in book form since 1987, were not used in the new textbooks. Furthermore, the original Spanish books were produced in Colombia rather than Nicaragua, and then Honduran Miskitus translated the text rather than using Nicaraguan Miskitu translators.

According to Buvollen, the introduction of such texts to the Atlantic coast without significant contextual modifications is not only bad politics but also bad pedagogy. He points out, for example, that such textbooks do not match the day-to-day reality of Miskitu children. Consequently, there is the potential for cognitive and cultural dissonance. Also, linguistically there is the aforementioned mismatch between Honduran and Nicaraguan Miskitu language. For starters, the initial word in the title of the book series, *siakni*, apparently means "blue" in the variety of Miskitu spoken in Honduras, but it does not mean blue in Nicaraguan Miskitu.

The lack of congruity between the world of the textbook and the Miskitu world is further illustrated in that Miskitu children are instructed in the books to use dictionaries if they do not know a word. However, such Miskitu dictionaries do not exist according to Buvollen. Another example is that the children are asked to imagine being left home alone with a robot that watches over them while their parents are away. When the robot speaks gibberish the children in the textbook conclude that it must be talking "Indian." This equation of gibberish with Indian talk reflects the mainstream Nicaraguan attitude toward indigenous Atlantic Coast culture as being inferior (*Siakni Bara Pihni* 3, p 118).

All students need to expand their cultural horizons; therefore, one can appreciate why stories that transcend the Miskitu world are included in the textbook series. But why should they have a monopoly in the texts? As Buvollen puts it, "At least since the early 1980s, several Miskitus with an interest in resurrecting their cultural heritage have collected many stories related to their rich way of life.

Why not include some of these stories in the texts.” (1992, p. 3) In sum, Buvollen criticizes the books for promoting a form of cultural imperialism packaged in the Miskitu language. The sociocultural reality that is represented in the colorful pages of the texts does not correspond to the experiences and values of Miskitu children. (The only exception is the first grade reader. Because it is introducing the letter sounds in Miskitu, it cannot be a direct translation because the Spanish and Miskitu languages have different sets of phonemes. Thus, in introducing letter sounds with Miskitu words, some of the stories and illustrations are somewhat reflective of the local culture.)

Because Nicaraguan classrooms tend to place high value on the use of nationally approved textbooks, it is important to consider the extent to which these texts mirror the students’ needs, aspirations, and reality. In the case of Nicaragua, one can speculate as to why the Ministry of Education has decided to introduce such minimally modified texts to the Atlantic Coast. The reason why such culturally inappropriate textbooks were introduced certainly has to do with the realignment of educational content to reflect the new government’s ideology. That the culturally and linguistically appropriate materials developed in the 1980s are not apparently being used has to do, at least partially, with the ideological nature of some of these materials. For example, one can consider a Spanish-Miskitu bilingual story published in the 1980s as part of the Colección Carlitos (a set of educational materials developed by the Sandinista government). On the one hand, *El viaje de dos niños miskitos por el Río Coco* (Bickel & Luisier, 1985) is the story about a brother and sister traveling in their canoe on the Rio Coco to visit their grandfather. The story and illustrations richly portray indigenous foods, family customs, history, folklore, tools, geography and transportation. On the other hand, the children in the story are frequently reminded of the many contributions of the Sandinista Revolution, for example in the construction of medical clinics, improvement of hygiene, and organization of work brigades to build a school. The story ends with the grandfather saying to the children:

It’s true children, this trip was a great experience for you. And now, let’s see if we in this community can do something for the revolution! Because it is also our revolution. And we have to start working so that our children have a better future.” Prendilicia and Basilio reflect

on what their grandfather just told them... They too want to participate in this revolution! (p. 44).

It is clear that ideological differences between the Sandinista and Chamorro governments are an important reason for the quick implementation of the *Azul y Blanco* reading series in the Atlantic Coast. The action also suggests that despite the stated affirmation of local culture in the five-year plan for bilingual education, the new government considers that the national cultural heritage should take precedence over the Atlantic Coast regional heritage. Finally, one also has to consider the possible pragmatic reasons for choosing such an approach, namely, that it is potentially cheaper to take existing Spanish texts and reproduce such texts in Miskitu with minor modifications, rather than producing a new series from scratch.

Regardless of the reasons, the Chamorro government chose to introduce such culturally and linguistically inappropriate textbooks to the Atlantic Coast, and the consequences in the area have been deeply felt. The following case illustrates this point. Juan Paiz, the regional delegate for RAAN, refused to distribute the textbooks, which he considered inappropriate and insulting to the coastal peoples. He was consequently fired, and the position of regional delegate was eliminated in December of 1991, when a nationwide streamlining of ministry administrative positions took effect.

General tensions between regional political authorities in RAAN and the central government (over the failure of the Chamorro government to cede decision-making powers to the autonomous region) have spilled over into the educational sphere. For example, as of April 1992,⁹ the regional governor of RAAN, Leonel Pantin, refused to recognize the power of the MED supervisor, Barnabas Waldan, to oversee educational matters in the northern coastal region. According to the RAAN governor, the appointment should have been his prerogative. He proceeded to appoint his own General Secretary of Education, and educational supplies and vehicles were withheld from Waldan (Solórzano, 1992, p. 3). These vehicles were the only means to distribute paychecks to teachers living outside Puerto Cabezas. These teachers, therefore, went for several months without being paid. (The transportation

⁹The 1992 date is accurate though it follows the publication year for this issue of the FORUM. The discrepancy is due to delay in publishing the journal-editors.

costs for them to come to Puerto Cabezas on their own to pick up their pay would have consumed almost an entire month's check.)

The Linguistic Model for the Atlantic Coast: A Commentary

In determining the linguistic model to be used for any bilingual-intercultural education program, the local sociolinguistic context of language-use has to be taken into account. That is, language planners have to consider the role of the local culture and language use patterns in determining what is and is not feasible regarding a particular bilingual education approach (Ovando & Collier, 1985). For example, as regards the Atlantic Coast, understanding the nature of language contact and variation across and within the various ethnolinguistic groups is of enormous importance. Knowing, for instance, which languages tend to become dominant, when language shifts occur in a particular setting, is important in understanding intercultural communication between groups that speak "high prestige" language varieties and those groups that represent "low prestige" languages and dialects. As a case in point, why is it that on the Atlantic Coast, Sumus tend to speak Miskitu but Miskitus tend not to speak Sumu? Complicating the task for language planners is the finding that there are often a variety of dialects within a given indigenous group. This is the case, for example, among the Sumus who speak such differentiated dialects as Ulwas, Twahka and Panamahka. Another important aspect to take into account in the development of a linguistic model for bilingual education is the function of literacy in cultures which have tended to emphasize oral traditions. Given very limited resources, how much continued emphasis should reading and writing in L1 receive when ultimately the social context does not require extensive literacy in L1? Within the context of the Miskitu people, for example, the main function of Miskitu literacy probably has been Bible reading through the efforts of the Moravian church to translate it into Miskitu. On the other hand, Shapiro (1987) notes that during the Sandinista period, Miskitu literacy was seen as being integrally related to efforts at reclaiming Miskitu history and having the communication skills to contribute to regional development (p. 79). Given this situation, how much emphasis should be placed on continued literacy development in Miskitu, for example, beyond the initial stages of reading and writing in that language? Should very limited resources be spent to maintain literacy in L1, or, once initial literacy in L1 has

been achieved, should literacy efforts be focused on a more universal language like Spanish or English?¹⁰ And should emphasis on such “prestige” languages be viewed as a source of empowerment for such persons or as a form of linguistic imperialism? Finding answers to such questions is crucial to the success of any bilingual program. Yet they are issues which have not yet been sufficiently addressed in the case of the Atlantic Coast.

Nicaragua is not unique in its efforts as a Latin American country to provide bilingual education to indigenous populations. Planners could profit from the lessons learned from Bolivia, México, and Perú. Like Nicaragua, these countries reflect rich and complex ethnolinguistic legacies in contexts of regional marginalization and poverty. In all cases, their respective national governments have, to one degree or another, accepted some form of bilingual education as a necessary instrument of national integration. But these countries have also found that successful bilingual intercultural programs are very difficult to establish. This is because language, as an integral component of culture, is embedded in a complex psychosocial, ideological, spiritual, political, and economic web. For bilingual education programs to be successful, the process must have a strong egalitarian component in which all languages, dialects, and cultures are seen as logical tools for communicating and extracting meaning in life, regardless of the context. Much of the difficulty in the implementation of bilingual programs in heterogeneous societies stems from state authorities not recognizing the legitimacy of communication and cultural patterns of indigenous groups.¹¹

¹⁰We are not suggesting that reading should first be introduced in L2. There is much evidence that it is best for children from socially marginalized groups to receive initial literacy instruction in L1, the language which they understand best. In the case of Sumu and Miskitu, the transition from L1 literacy to Spanish literacy is facilitated by the fact that all three languages use the Roman alphabet, and there is some similarity between the graphophoneme systems. For instance, if a child can read the syllable *ma* in the Miskitu language, that syllable will also be decodable to the child if written in Spanish, because it represents virtually the same sound in Spanish.

¹¹For articles on bilingual education in Bolivia, Mexico, and Perú, see Albó, Modiano, and Escobar, respectively, in Christina Bratt Paulston (1988), *International Handbook of Bilingualism and Bilingual Education*.

Conclusions

The conceptualization and implementation of a bilingual education program for indigenous populations are a part of a larger political process involving the struggle for decision-making powers and control over land and natural resources. An adequate interpretation of the complexity of bilingual education involves examining historical and international forces that have shaped relations between central government authorities and dominant societal groups on the one hand and indigenous and minority populations on the other. For the populations of the Atlantic Coast to act as a part of Nicaraguan society, the central government will have to make concessions that indicate a true willingness to not only respect their cultures and languages but to delegate substantive decision-making powers in political, economic, and educational matters. As Bourgois (1981, p. 37) noted over a decade ago, "By emphasizing... what appears superficially to contradict national unity--the distinctive identities of the ethnic minorities--a greater trust and sympathy for the government is actually promoted." In addition, to realize the ideals of an appropriate bilingual education model for the Atlantic Coast, significant material aid and technical assistance will have to be channeled to the coastal populations--aid that does not perpetuate dependency but rather self-sustaining economic growth and cultural advancement through a strong educational system.

Over the past thirteen years, first of Sandinista rule and then of the Chamorro administration, there have been some notable achievements together with tragic setbacks and misunderstandings. In the Nicaraguan case, we have learned that issues and policies associated with human rights and resource allocation of indigenous peoples can only be understood and resolved in light of the larger political agenda of the Managua-based government. Despite the efforts of well-meaning Nicaraguan educators, the future of the current bilingual education program in the Atlantic Coast does not look altogether promising. Such lack of bilingual education promise is, to a large measure, a result of the intense political and ideological battles still raging between the Atlantic and Pacific Coasts. These conflicting agendas will shape pedagogical content, processes, and outcomes. Despite these uneasy tensions, the reality is that the distinct character of the Atlantic Coast region must be recognized not only in word but also in action if there is to be national unity. In Nicaragua, a country experiencing severe economic crises and

political turmoil, such a concession will not be easy but nonetheless necessary.

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